DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 276 775 TM 860 727

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TITLE Use of Photography as a Qualitative Evaluation Technique.
PUB DATE Oct 85
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evaluation Network and the Evaluation Research Society (Toronto, Canada, October 16-19, 1985).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Research; *Evaluation Methods; *Photography; *Program Evaluation; Qualitative Research; *Visual Aids; *Visual Stimuli

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the potential uses of photography and its practical implications as a qualitative evaluation technique. Potential uses are proposed: (1) systematic recording of a program activity; (2) highlighting specific events; (3) illustrating a point; (4) leading the evaluator to specific persons, activities, and places; (5) stimulating interviews; (6) verifying findings; and (7) offering multiple perspectives of the same event. Identification of events, time sampling, record keeping, composition, lighting, film, and obstrusiveness of the photographer are points to consider when photographing. Technical aspects to consider include type of film, film speed, and composition. When deciding to include photographs in an evaluation report: (1) determine that photographs enhance the report; (2) verify photographs prior to inclusion; and (3) clarify photographs with a caption. (JAZ)

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Use of Photography

as a Qualitative Evaluation Technique

Presented at the Annual Meeting of the

Evaluation Network and the Evaluation Research Society,

Toronto, Canada, October 16-19, 1985

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to present the use of photography as a qualitative evaluation technique. Included in the discussion were potential uses of photographs, practical considerations, and technical concerns. Ways to include photographs in an evaluation report were also presented. In order to provide a visual context and illustration of points that were made, examples of the ways in which photographs had been used in evaluation studies were presented in a slide show format.

Since the invention of the camera in the mid-1800's, photographs have been used to document events, cultural artifacts, and social behaviors. The fields of anthropology and sociology have used photography as one method of data collection. Two famous examples are the photographs that Margaret Mead took of Balinese life and those that the Farm Security Administration commissioned during the Depression.

While photographs are occasionally included in evaluation reports, the technique has not been used extensively in the area of program evaluation. The purpose of this paper is to explore the potential uses of visual imagery as a qualitative evaluation technique. In addition to presenting potential uses of photography as an evaluation technique, practical implications will be discussed. Issues such as identification of events, time sampling, record keeping, composition, lighting, exposure, film, and obtrusiveness of the photographer will be presented.

Potential Uses

Photographs can be used to systematically record a program activity. Photography can be seen as an extension of observation and as a complementary technique for interviewing. As such it is another strategy for collecting data. The camera is the data collection instrument, and the photos are the data. Corresponding field notes provide technical data (e.g., time, frame number, length of exposure, lens) as well as information about the context--the mood, the relationship between the subjects and photographer, and perceptions and reactions of the photographer to the situation. Just as you would not use all data in reporting on a program activity, you select those pictures that you feel are accurate and adequate portrayals of your program. Photographs enable you to add another dimension to your perspective about a

program. People should be able to view your photographs as a set of images consistent with your perspective of the program (Templin, 1982). Through procedures similar to content analysis, photos are examined on the basis of specific themes or events. The unit of coding, the photograph, helps you determine how you will visually depict program events and situations over time. These selected photographs serve not only as an illustration of an activity but they also document that an event has taken place.

Photographs can highlight specific events. In the course of any program, there are generally occasions that you want to document. For example, a one-time-only event may warrant pictures as evidence that it did occur. On the other hand, a recurring activity may also merit a photo, thereby focusing attention on that particular event. Two summers ago, we conducted a pilot enrichment program for minority students interested in pursuing careers in medicine. While photos were taken during each activity, certain ones were selected for inclusion in the final report. One was of administrators talking to students at an informal luncheon, a situation that does not occur frequently. That is an example of a one-time only event. Also included in the report were pictures of students attending clinical lectures, an everyday occurrence.

Photographs can illustrate a point. Two years ago the University of Virginia Evaluation Research Center conducted a qualitative evaluation of the Evaluation Network conference. As the photographer, selection of pictures depended not only on the program schedule but also on comments made by participants and the evaluation team. Session attendance was illustrated by pictures of nearly empty rooms due to poor participation and by pictures of people seated on the floor due to a popular topic or presenter. Thus photo-

graphs can highlight not only the presence but also the absence of persons or activities.

Prior to entry, photographs can key the evaluator to specific persons, activities, and places. Photographs can also be taken by program staff or participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). If an evaluator is contracted to conduct an evaluation of an ongoing program, photos may be available of staff, participants, and activities. These can cue the evaluator to specific persons to interview and events to observe. In addition, these existing photos can serve as a method of triangulation and cross-validating other sources of information.

Photographs can serve as a stimulus in interviewing. Visual images can be made in all phases of a program -- during design, field testing, implementation, and revision. Photographs that are taken during the early phases of a program can be shown later to participants and thus serve as a stimulus during an interview (Collier, 1967). Technology has also advanced to a stage where photographs can be shown to participants within minutes after taking. Polaroid cameras produce instant prints, and during the past year Polaroid has developed a slide film that can be developed in five minutes.

Photographs by participants can verify evaluation findings. Frequently program administrators and recipients take photographs at events for personal remembrance. These can be lent to the evaluator and analyzed in terms of verification of specific program activities. They can also be used during interviewing of program participants. Brown and his colleagues (1982) have also suggested that participants be asked to photograph an event. These

photographs are then pooled, and comparisons are made to identify similarities and differences. Participants' perspectives can differ among themselves and with the evaluator.

Photographs can offer multiple perspectives of the same event. The way a photographer chooses to shoot a picture can lead to very different perceptions of an event. The angle of the shot, the distance from the subject, the type of lighting, and the type of film all play a role in the shooting of a single picture. Because there is no single way to view an event, you must take numerous shots of the same event and then determine which picture best illustrates the situation. This is not unlike other data collection techniques, but the results may be more dramatic because they can be visually presented. For example, a picture in black-and-white is very different from one in color; the viewer keys in to different aspects. The instrument or camera is the same, but the end product is very different. As a comparison to a more conventional data collection tool--the survey--a mailed survey will elicit different results from one that is administered face-to-face. Because it is visual, photography makes more obvious the difficulties that we have with all data (Becker, 1982).

In addition, perspectives differ widely from person to person. If you asked two people to photograph the same event, they would most likely end up with two different sets of pictures, each reflecting his or her style. For example, Brooks Institute in Santa Barbara requires all freshmen to take photos of the Mission Home as their first assignment. This assignment allows them to see the multiple perceptions that can exist on a single subject.

Points to Consider

List the events or situations to be photographed. Prior to site entry, it is helpful to identify persons, events, and situations to be photographed. To compile this list, you can capitalize on personal or others' experiences with the program; a literature review of similar programs; program materials and past reports; and interviews with relevant participants and staff (Covert, Fang, Heilman & Schwandt, 1984). Once you are on site, a schedule of key photographs can be developed. The aid of program staff and participants may be solicited. Sampling by type of event should be considered, particularly if the program extends over a long period of time.

Be spontaneous. Spontaneity is encouraged, and you might consider carrying a camera whenever you are on site. Frequently the most rewarding photographs are those that are taken on the spur of the moment (Fang, 1985). Flexibility is the key; try to be responsive to unpredictable and uncontrolled behaviors (Collier, 1962). For example, I was taking photographs of classes that were being held in an enrichment program this past summer. As soon as one of the students saw me enter the classroom, she asked that I take a picture of her and one of the other students. This photo was later used to illustrate the friendships that are formed during the program.

Obtain the permission of key personnel. As a courtesy to the program director, staff, or other participants, request permission to take photographs (Fang, 1985). If you plan to use the photograph in an evaluation report, you may consider asking subjects to sign a model release form, particularly when the photo is a candid one. Professional photographers are now required to obtain model release forms if they plan to publish the photograph. The only exception is when the picture was taken in the public

domain. Diane Arbus was one photographer who would have had difficulty obtaining model releases due to the controversial nature of her photographs. Her photographs frequently did not present people in the most attractive way.

Sample over time. If the evaluation focuses on the introduction of an intervention, baseline (i.e., pre-intervention) and post-intervention photographs may be necessary. Photographs that are taken during a single day, over the course of days, weeks, months, or even years can follow an established plan. Templin (1979) emphasized the importance of shooting photographic sequences in order to record interactions over time for the purposes of improving representativeness. Again, candid as well as posed shots should be considered.

Take numerous photographs. In this particular case, more is better. Frequently, only one or two images may be selected for printing from a roll of 36 exposures. The greater the number of photographs, the larger the base on which to choose for presenting evaluation findings (Fang, 1985). In addition, each picture is its own moment, frozen in time. As Becker said, "pictures represent a small and highly selected sample of the real world about which they are supposed to be conveying some truth" (1979). The final selection of pictures is your visual representation of that person or event.

Keep accurate logs. As soon as a photograph is taken, note the negative/slide frame, date, time, subject or name(s) of person(s) photographed, location, and situation (e.g., what the persons are doing while the photograph is being taken). A small notepad that is kept in a pocket or camera bag is helpful. You may also want to note the context of the situation, including your own feelings and reactions to what is occurring at the time.

Technical Aspects

Decide what type of film to use. The decision of whether to use color or black-and-white film frequently depends on available resources. Color is more costly, in terms of negative development and print enlargement. However, high speed, color print film (ASA 1000) is available on the market, and most cities now have quick service facilities (i.e., 1 1/2 hours, from cassette to print). Ektachrome color slide film and Polaroid color and black-and-white slide film are also quick in terms of development time. The disadvantages with slide film are the need of a projector and the cost and slowness of obtaining high-quality prints. Black-and-white negative film is the least expensive in terms of film and print prices. If turnaround time is important, black-and-white film is not a desirable option since camera stores usually cannot offer anything less than an overnight service. If darkroom facilities are on site and the photographer has the necessary skills, this becomes a more viable alternative. This is particularly true if time is not a factor.

Decide on the speed of the film. Slow-speed film has little grain but requires lots of light. If the photographs are to be taken indoors, a flash attachment is generally necessary. Use of a flash can be distracting, particularly if back-to-back pictures are needed. High-speed film is grainier but can be used in low lighting situations. This is particularly important if the evaluator wants to avoid using a flash unit or tripod. Tripods can be used effectively if photographs are posed. They are also recommended if the length of exposure time is less than 1/30 of a second. There are several lightweight tripods available on the market (Fang, 1985).

Compose each picture prior to shooting. This is more difficult than it sounds, particularly if candid photos are desirable. If you can, try to crop with the camera, not with the enlarger. (If you must crop with the enlarger, this should be indicated on the print.) Someone asked me why this makes a difference, since it is arbitrary where you crop and when you crop. There is currently a debate in the photography world as to whether it is better to previsualize your photos and to use the camera as a cropping tool or not. I tend to do the former. In composing a picture the following questions should be considered:

1. **Who are you photographing?** Once you have decided who the subject is, you must decide if the shot will be posed or candid. There is an ongoing debate in the photography world as to whether posed pictures represent "truth." Is the picture distorted if the photographer arranges the persons or event to coincide with his notion of what the situation should be? Irving Penn provides an example of this in his book, Worlds in a Small Room. In this book he arranged the poses of each of his subjects.

Posed pictures generally involve the consent of the participants. When I take posed pictures, I try to place the person at ease and take a number of shots (usually a roll of 36 exposures) so that the person has time to relax.

If the photograph is candid, you may want to consider whether this will affect your rapport and whether the act of taking the picture will affect the ongoing activity. Even when a flash unit is not used, people tend to notice a camera, and this frequently has an impact on their behavior. While it may cause some to ham it up, others may be more reticent and tense. What you do not want to do is create an unnatural situation. If you decide that

numerous photographs are needed, you can visit the site in advance and take dozens of pictures using an empty camera. This will help the persons become more accustomed to being photographed. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) suggest that pictures not be taken early in the evaluation process but that they be shot once the photographer has had a chance to establish rapport. They indicated that obtrusiveness can be minimized through familiarity or distraction (i.e., other events are occurring at the same time so picture taking is not as noticeable).

2. **What are you photographing?** Program staff and participants may have suggestions as to what they want to have photographed. The subject of the photograph may also affect the way the picture is ultimately taken. The focus of the picture, whether it is a person or activity, will determine how the picture is taken. You can compensate for distance in some instances by using a longer lens. (A long lens may be required if a candid shot is desired.) You must decide, however, the angle of the shot (e.g., straight on, above, below, from the side), the depth of field (i.e., the amount of focus in front of and behind the object of interest), and the length of the exposure (e.g., blurred or stop action). Length of exposure will also determine the need of a flash unit or tripod.

3. **At what time of day and at what location are you shooting?** The time of day and location will also determine what kind of picture will be taken. If the picture is planned outside during daylight, the time of day will determine the angle of light. My own bias is to take pictures in the early morning and late afternoon, since that is when I think light is most beautiful. Noon light tends to be harsh, but you can compensate by using fill flash. Photos may also be taken inside under both natural and artificial

lighting situations; you will need to check your light meter to determine whether a flash unit is necessary. You will also want to observe the location prior to shooting and decide what the boundaries of the picture will include.

Inclusion of Photographs in an Evaluation Report

Photographs should enhance the report. Photography is another method of data collection and should be treated as such. Prior to the inclusion of this strategy in the evaluation plan, the evaluator should consider the ways in which photographs can visually depict program events or situations. This does not mean, however, that the design be strictly preordinate. On the contrary an emergent design lends itself to the identification of additional photographs to be taken.

Verify photographs prior to inclusion in the report. While this may not be desirable in every report, the sharing of photographs can lead not only to a verification of program events but also the identification of additional situations to be photographed. Program staff and participants may have strong feelings as to which photographs should be selected for the report; the evaluator should guard against being co-opted in such instances. One of the most difficult tasks is to select those photographs that clearly enhance the report. The evaluator must decide which photographs best illustrate program events. Selection should be based not only on representativeness but also on uniqueness. Photographs serve as a visual source of data and can be used as a method of triangulation.

Clarify the photographs in the report. It is helpful if the evaluator writes a caption that corresponds to each photograph. The text should also refer to the photographs, and these should be incorporated in the text in

places that are most appropriate (Templin, 1982). If a table of contents is used, photographs should be listed separately. The evaluator also needs to state the chronological order of the photographs and whether they were cropped or altered.

Final Questions

The following are questions to consider once you have made the decision to include photography as one of your data collection methods.

1. How can photographs be used to enrich our understanding of what is taking place in the program?
2. What is the relationship between the image and the phenomenon that it was intended to record?
3. What relationship exists between the viewer, photograph, and situation in which it is viewed? (Wagner, 1982)

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